

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CAPE T 00545 132253Z

ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5951

INFO AMEMBASSY ADR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

UNCLAS CAPE TOWN 0545

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PFOR, RH, SF

SUBJ: BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE

SUMMARY: UK FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN TOLD PRESS CONFERENCE HE HAD "VERY DETAILED AND FRUITFUL DISCUSSION" WITH SMITH AND COLLEAGUES. HE SAID PURPOSE, SHARED BY US, WAS TO FIND WAY TO ACHIEVE PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO MAJORITY RULE BY 1978. OWEN SAID HE WILL VISIT RHODESIA APRIL 16 FOR FURTHER MEETING WITH SMITH. OWEN STRESSED SEVERAL TIMES DESIRE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH US AND INTENTION OF US TO TAKE "ACTIVE PART" IN ANY FUTURE CONFERENCE. ON SMITH'S REACTION, OWEN SAID BOTH AGREED MUCH MORE DETAILED WORK NEEDED BEFORE EITHER COULD GIVE CONSIDERED JUDGEMENT ON FEASIBILITY OF NEW CONFERENCE BUT "THERE WAS NO OUTRIGHT REJECTION". OWEN SAID HE "BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE" TO HAVE PEACEFUL TRANSITION BY 1978. END SUMMARY.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 CAPE T 00545 132253Z

1. OWEN BEGAN CONFERENCE BY ANNOUNCING HE WILL GO ON TO GABORONE AND ZAMBIA AS PLANNED BUT ON APRIL 16 WILL MEET SMITH IN SALISBURY. HE "HOPED" TO RETURN TO UK VIA LAGOS AND MEET WITH GARBA ON APRIL 17.

2. OWEN SAID TALKS WITH SMITH AND COLLEAGUES HAD BEEN VERY DETAILED AND FRUITFUL. THEY WERE "HELPFUL AND FRIENDLY"

AND CONDUCTED IN "INTELLIGENT AND SENSIBLE" MANNER. HE SAID SMITH AND COLLEAGUES REALIZED THEY FACE DIFFICULT SITUATION, THAT FAILURE THIS EFFORT COULD BRING "GREAT DIFFICULTIES". HE SAID MUCH DETAILED DISCUSSION STILL REQUIRED AND HE WANTS TO TALK TO OTHERS; INCLUDING US. GOAL WAS PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO MAJORITY RULE IN 1978, A GOAL SHARED BY US. PURPOSE OF A NEW CONFERENCE WOULD BE TO WORK OUT NEW CONTITTUTION, INCLUDING AN ELECTORAL PROCESS.

3. ON QUESTION OF "HOW FAR US WILL GO IN ALL THIS", OWEN SAID US WOULD BE IN "MUCH MORE FORWARD POSITION THAN AT GENEVA." SAID HE WOULD WANT US "TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK, TO TAKE PART". ASKED BY NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT JOHN BURNES WHY SO MUCH IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO US PARTICIPATION--"WHAT LEVERAGE DOES IT HAVE THAT YOU DON'T" OWEN SAID WITH A SMILE, IT HAS A LOT MORE THAN WE DO." HE SAID MANY AFRICAN LEADERS "OVERESTIMATED" POWER OF UK. HE SAID ADVENT OF NEW US ADMINISTATION "DEEPLY COMMITTED TO AFRICA" PLUS TRADITIONAL UK-US RELATIONSHIP MEANT THAT "WE CAN ACHIEVE MORE WORKING TOGETHER."

4. ON QUESTION WHY HE DECIDED TO GO TO RHODESIA, OWEN SAID HE HAD ALWAYS REALIZED HE WOULD NEED TO GO EVENTUALLY BUT HE FIRST WANTED TO MEET SMITH PERSONALLY. HE FELT, HE SAID, THERE MUST BE "A CLIMATE" WITHIN WHICH TALKS COULD PROGRESS. ASKED IF SMITH STILL COMMITTED TO MAJORITY RULE IN TWO YEARS, OWEN SAID HE THOUGH SMITH WAS "SINCERE". SAID SMITH WOULD NO DOUBT RECOGNIZE THE MANY "TIMETABLE PROBLEMS" BUT IN ANY CASE IT WAS "ONLY BASIS" ON WHICH HE, OWEN, COULD NEGOTIATE.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 CAPE T 00545 132253Z

5. ASKED IF HE HAD A FIXED DATE IN 1978, OWEN SAID NO. AGREEMENT ON NEW CONSTITUTION WOULD REQUIRE A BILL IN UK PARLIAMENT WHICH WOULD HAVE TO FOLLOW NORMAL PATH THROUGH BOTH HOUSES. THIS WOULD START IN NOVEMBER, 1977 AND RUN INTO 1978. THEN THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE ELECTORAL PROCESS WITH QUESTIONS OF HOW AND WHEN TO START AND WHO WOULD SUPERVISE. PEACEFUL CLIMATE WOULD HAVE TO BE PROVIDED AND BLACK LEADERS NOW ABOARD WOULD NEED TO RETURN AND PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS.

6. ON QUESTION OF WHETHER FOREIGN POLICE OR MILITARY FORCE WOULD BE REQUIRED TO TFORECE AND SUPERVISE ANY AGREEMENT, OWEN SAID "CERTAINLY" UK TROOPS WOULD NOT BE SENT AND HE "DOUBTED" WHETHER US CONGRESS WOULD BE KEEN ON SENDING US TROOPS. THIS WAS ONE OF DIFFICULT QUESTIONS TO BE WORKED OUT. ASKED IF SMITH GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO RESIGN BEFORE ELECTIONS OWEN SAID THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE "FUNDAMENTAL" CHANGESAASOME KIND OF INTERIM OF CARETAKER GOVERNMENT.

7. WHILE MAJORITY OF QUESTIONS FOCUSSED ON RHODESIA, THERE WAS

ONE QUESTION ON WHAT THE WEST WANTS WITH REGARD TO NAMIBIA
AND TURNHALLE CONFERENCE. OWEN REFERRED TO FIVE-POWER DEMARCHE AND
SAID
THERE MUST BE DISCUSSIONS IN TERMS OF UN RESOLUTION 385.
ALTHOUGH CHAIRMAN OF CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED AT OUTSET THAT OWEN
WOULD NOT DISCUSS INTERNAL SOUTH AFRICAN AFFAIRS, LAST QUESTIONER
ASKED IF HE HAD DISCUSSED INTERNAL SITUATION WITH VORSTER.
OWEN REPLIED THAT THEY HAD HAD "VERY INTERESTING DISCUSSIONS
AND A VERY INTERESTING LUNCH". BOWDLER

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